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Shcharansky's trial

The trial of Anatoly Shcharansky nears, and unfair though it is to the defendant to dwell on it, much hangs on the procedure and the outcome of extra-personal interests.

Shcharansky is, we can safely assume, innocent. But he is an important pawn in whom the Soviet Union has greatly invested. Perversely, the Communists have been greatly aided by the astonishing behavior of President Carter and one of his key security assistants, David Aaron.

Briefly on the matter of Shcharansky. He is a computer mathemetician who in April 1973 applied for permission to emigrate to Israel. Permission denied. Why? Because he "possessed classified information," a charge at which everyone in Moscow who is permitted to laugh, laughed. Shcaransky had been employed in the Moscow Research Institute for Oil and Gas, which is officially unclassified.

Shcharansky's offense is that a) he is Jewish — the Soviet Union's frenzied campaign against the Jews is unabated; b) he sought to leave the country; and c) by joining the forlorn committee of Soviet citizens who endeavored to monitor Soviet compliance with the Helsinki pact, he insulted the people who signed that pact.

Thus far, routine Soviet stuff. But then a year ago, having arrested Shcharansky, the Soviet Union announced that he would be tried for treason, an offense that not uncommonly brings a death sentence. The prosecutors came up with one Dr. Sanya Lipvasky who had shared an apartment for a few months with Shcharansky during his bachelor days.

Lipavsky, the Soviet press reported, had confessed to the Soviet Union in great remorse that during 1975 he had acted as a CIA agent and, as a repentant Jewish dissident, he was now presumably ready to testify against Shcharansky, again presumably a co-conspirator. It is not clear what services Lipavsky was in position to render the CIA since he was a doctor in a clinic that examined taxi and bus drivers.

In June of last year, President Carter announced at a press conference that Shcharansky "has never had any sort of relationship, to our knowledge, with the CIA." But then last March, David Aaron, an important assistant to Brzezinski, tipped off *Time* magazine that in fact Lipavsky had indeed been active with the CIA. Between them — Carter and Aaron — about every protocol in the spy business was violated.

The residual problem is that if the Soviet Union "proves" — i.e., presents hard evidence that Lipavsky was in fact a CIA agent — Carter is labeled a liar. That is unpleasant, but not unendurable. What is truly damaging is the prospect that Soviet dissidents would stand to forfeit much of their sympathy outside Russia if one of their members was proved to be a U.S. agent.

Never mind the mitigating facts — almost certainly, Lipavsky was a double agent, in this case hired by the KGB to approach the CIA to forge a synthetic link expressly for the purpose of disclosing that link in publicly useful circumstances.

Almost lost in the excitement of Shcharansky are two other Soviet Jews, Grigory Goldstein and Pavel Abramovich. They are to be tried for something called "parasitism," which is the crime of being unemployed. It happens that they are unemployed because, on applying to emigrate from the Soviet Union, they were promptly fired from their jobs. Abramovich thereupon made a frugal living by teaching Hebrew. He did this openly, paying all the relevant taxes. But he was nevertheless charged with unemployment inasmuch as Hebrew is not an "official language." How can anyone be employed teaching a non-existent language?

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